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Dickens: A Tale of Two Cities Transcript

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DICKENS: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

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There is, of course, a third city involved, and it is Manchester.

Dickens tells us in his *Preface* to the first volume edition of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) that he 'first conceived the main idea of this story' whilst acting 'with my children and friends in Mr Wilkie Collins's drama of *The Frozen Deep*'. It is this element which gives the novel great personal significance for Dickens, and we might usefully reflect on that for a moment or two.

In the *Preface* he continues:

'As the idea became familiar to me, it gradually shaped itself into its present form. Throughout its execution, it has had complete possession of me; I have so far verified what is done and suffered in these pages, as that I have certainly done and suffered it all myself.'

It is that final sentence which underlines for us the personal intensity in this powerful and compelling work, an aspect to which we shall return later.

In 1857 he had assisted his friend and fellow novelist Wilkie Collins in writing a play called *The Frozen Deep*, and putting it on as an amateur production at his home in Tavistock Square (now BMA Headquarters) where a room had been specially designed to hold amateur theatricals. Dickens himself played Richard Wardour, the flawed but ultimately noble hero who sacrifices himself in favour of his friend Aldersley's survival to be with the woman they both love. It was a play partly inspired by the 1845 Franklin expedition to the Arctic to try to find the North West Passage, in which all its members perished and there had been some suggestion of cannibalism. It is a plot line to which he returns in *A Tale of Two Cities*, with the triangle of Lucie, Damay, Carton.

Later that year, the production was to be presented in Manchester and Dickens felt that public performance should not be done by friends and family, but that professional players should be engaged. It was by this means he met a theatrical family, the Ternans, and particularly Mrs Ternan's daughter Ellen, with whom he fell in love, and as a result of which he separated from his wife the following year. Ellen played a minor part in *The Frozen Deep*, called Lucy. When he creates Lucie in *A Tale of Two Cities* he gives her some of Ellen's appearance, and that final *e*.

Sydney Carton is a particularly interesting piece of character creation: the talented wastrel who sacrifices himself for love, so that the woman he wants may live her life happily with her husband. Dickens wrote 'I must say I like my Carton. And I have a faint idea sometimes, that if I acted him, I could have done something with his life and death.' When planning the novel and naming the characters, he originally thought of naming Carton Dick rather than Sydney. Dick would be an echo of Richard Wardour in *The Frozen Deep*, of course, and the parallelism in the sets of initials (Charles Damay and Dick Carton: *CD - DC*) would have further underlined the 'doubleness' in the two male leads of the novel. 'Doubleness' is a massive issue for him at this time. But the initials are his own, of course, and perhaps he felt that this was all coming rather too close to home, at this point of great crisis for him.

It will be helpful to recall the events in Dickens's life at this time:

In 1857, *Little Dorrit* was published in volume form, having been serialised in monthly parts between 1855 and 1857. *The Frozen Deep* was performed, leading to Dickens meeting Ellen Ternan and falling in love; his marriage was on very unstable ground at this time.

In April 1858, he began presenting Public Readings for profit as distinct from readings for charitable purposes (which he also continued to do). This created a new relationship with his readers and he became 'the greatest reader of the greatest writer of the age'. Seasons in London, then provincial UK tours, and then to the USA, followed from now on to the end of his life.

In May 1858 he separated from Catherine, to whom he had been married since 1836, and in June 1858 proclaimed this separation publicly as 'some domestic trouble of mine'. In November he started to wind up *Household Words* and separate from Bradbury and Evans, his publishers. In April 1859 *All the Year Round* was established as its successor with Dickens owning 75%

and W H Wills 25%, whereas *Household Words* had been shared with publishers Bradbury and Evans. On 30 April 1859, chapters 1-3 of *A Tale of Two Cities* were published in this new journal.

Notwithstanding Manchester's place in the history of the conception of the novel, the two principal cities are, of course, London and Paris.

Dickens's acquaintance with London began when as a ten year-old boy he was brought there as the result of a work-induced move by his father. Early privation and suffering in these years is well-documented and the young Charles Dickens saw on his wanderings through the metropolis many disturbing and unsettling sights, which were to haunt him for years. His experiences gave him an 'extensive and peculiar' knowledge of the city and it was later said of him that 'he knew it all, from Bow to Brentford.'

It was a place of wretchedness and darkness, but also a place of great fascination. Whilst he was later in adulthood to describe it as 'a vile place' (letter to Bulwer Lytton in February 1851), he also acknowledged how important it was to his creative processes. On 30 August 1846, he wrote to Forster about the difficulties he was experiencing with his writing of *Dombey and Son*, in

'the absence of streets... A day in London sets me up again and starts me. But the toil and labour of writing, day after day, without that magic lantern, is IMMENSE!!'

Walter Bagehot, in a review of Dickens's work in 1858, famously said that Dickens described London 'like a special correspondent for posterity':

'Mr Dickens's genius is especially suited to the delineation of city life. London is like a newspaper; everything is there, and everything is disconnected. There is every kind of person in some houses; but there is no more connection between the houses than between the neighbours in the lists of 'births, marriages, and deaths.' As we change from the broad leader to the squalid police-report, we pass a corner and we are in a changed world. This is advantageous to Mr Dickens's genius. His memory is full of instances of old buildings and curious people, and he does not care to piece them together. On the contrary, each scene, to his mind, is a separate alertness of observation that is observable in those who live by it. He describes London like a special correspondent for posterity.'

Dickens though, from a very early stage in his career, was seeing connections and principles of organisation in his writing about London: a city of extremes in wealth and poverty, a labyrinth, a maze. He was to develop a darkening vision of the city through his later works: the fog-bound city of *Bleak House*, the prison city of *Little Dorrit*, the city of dustheaps and destructive river in *Our Mutual Friend*.

Dickens first visited Paris in 1844 on his way to Italy and he records those first impressions in a letter to the Count D'Orsay on 7 August 1844:

'We had a charming journey here. I cannot tell you what an immense impression Paris made upon me. It is the most extraordinary place in the World. I was not prepared for, and really could not have believed in, its perfectly distinct and separate character. My eyes ached and my head grew giddy, as novelty, novelty, novelty; nothing but strange and striking things; came swarming before me. I cannot conceive any place so perfectly and wonderfully expressive of its own character; its secret character no less than that which is on its surface; as Paris is. I walked about the streets--in and out, up and down, backwards and forwards --during the two days we were there; and almost every house, and every person I passed, seemed to be another leaf in the enormous book that stands wide open there. I was perpetually turning over, and never coming any nearer the end. There never was such a place for a description. If I had only a larger sheet of paper (I have ordered some for next time) I am afraid I should plunge, wildly, into such a lengthened account of those two days as would startle you.'

Paris was then a city of some 900,000 people: about half the size of London. It expanded to over 1,800,000 by the late 1860s, but lacked the sprawling and uncontrolled nature of London. The 1850s and 1860s were to see significant changes to the physical appearance of Paris as a result of the reconstruction work undertaken by the Prefect of the Seine, Baron Hausmann, which swept away much of the old city which Dickens reconstructs in his picture of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Paris in this novel. The narrow streets and tall houses which creating rabbit-warrens of poverty and squalor very like parts of London with which he was familiar, had been replaced by *planned* urban development, apartment blocks, grand boulevards and parks. At the end of *A Tale of Two Cities*, for example, he reminds readers of one of the changes to the Parisian landscape, where the Place de la Concorde is constructed on the site of the Bastille, destroyed in 1789-90.

Dickens visited Paris at least fifteen times between 1844 and 1868, at times renting apartments for significantly lengthy stays: November 1846 to February 1847, October 1855 to April 1856 and October to December 1862. He visited in January 1863 when he gave a phenomenally successful series of readings in the British Embassy. His last two recorded visits were in 1865 and 1868. These visits spanned a period of political change as well as change to urban topography. Louis Philippe's constitutional monarchy of 1844 ended with the 1848 Revolution and the Second Republic. In 1852 Louis Napoléon was declared Emperor as Napoleon III and his reign lasted until 1870, the year of Dickens's death.

Paris was, during Dickens's lifetime, a vibrant modernizing city, replacing its ancient networks of crowded unstable buildings with planned elegance, open spaces and light. In October 1862 Dickens wrote to W H Wills, his sub-editor on *All the Year Round*, that

'... preparations for some amazing new street are in rapid progress... Wherever I turn, I see some astounding new work, doing or done. When you come over here - you shall see sights.'

But, being Dickens, he was also fascinated by the darker side of the city, finding it 'a wicked and detestable place, though wonderfully attractive' as he wrote to John Forster during his 1846-7 visit. And he was constantly drawn to visit the Morgue, 'dragged by invisible force' as he put it in 'Travelling Abroad' (*All the Year Round*, 7 April 1860). The Morgue was listed as one of the visitor attractions of the city and it clearly appealed to Dickens, always drawn by the 'attraction of repulsion', whether at home or abroad.

As always too, his eye for detail is evident, as he describes the city in *Pictures from Italy* on his way out of it to continue his journey southwards in 1844:

'There was, of course, very little in the aspect of Paris - as we rattled near the dismal Morgue and over the Pont Neuf - to reproach us for our Sunday travelling. The wine-shops (every second house) were driving a roaring trade; awnings were spreading, and chairs and tables arranging, outside the cafes, preparatory to the eating of ices, and drinking of cool liquids, later in the day; shoe-blacks were busy on the bridges; shops were open; carts and wagons clattered to and fro; the narrow, up-hill, funnel-like streets across the River, were so many dense perspectives of crowd and bustle, parti-coloured night-caps, tobacco-pipes, blouses, large boots, and shaggy heads of hair; nothing at that hour denoted a day of rest, unless it were the appearance, here and there, of a family pleasure-party, crammed into a bulky old lumbering cab; or of some contemplative holiday-maker in the freest and easiest dishabille, leaning out of a low garret window, watching the drying of his newly polished shoes on the little parapet outside (if a gentleman), or the airing of her stockings in the sun (if a lady), with calm anticipation.'

The degree to which Dickens has visualized both cities in his novel and set them back in time can be seen from the early topographical investigations of members of The Dickens Fellowship as recorded in its journal *The Dickensian*. Thus, in 1927, two articles appear, 'One City' by E Beresford Chancellor and 'The Other City, Paris' by H Pearl Adam. Both articles identify places in the novel with that indefatigable topographical enthusiasm which marked out the early Dickensians.

Chancellor directs us to Childs's Bank, the original of Tellson's, directly next to Temple Bar, on the south side of the thoroughfare known as No. 1 Fleet Street.' He leads us to Hanging Sword Alley, home of the Crunchers, in Whitefriars, to Newgate (by 1927 the Central Criminal Court), to Mr Stryver's chambers in King's Bench Walk, Temple, and to the Manette home in Soho.

Pearl Adam escorts readers to the site of many Parisian locations:

'The Bastille has gone, trams and taxis and omnibuses fly hooting more loudly than owls between what were its dungeons and what were its towers, those equally forlorn strongholds of solitude. A railway-station, some cafés, a bank, two drapers' shops, a Column commemorating a minor revolution, and a few harassed policemen on point duty, stand where the Bastille stood. The Pont de la Concorde in the wide and tree-decked western Paris, carries to the Chamber of Deputies politicians, to the aristocratic quarter tourists, who alike forget that the platform of this cheerful white bridge was built of the time-darkened blocks of the Bastille, and that their feet perhaps strike above some stone that still bears the half-graved initials of some forgotten prisoner.'

We also go to St Antoine, the Pont-Neuf, and to see 'a bit of one wall' of La Force Prison.

Dickens makes it clear in the famous opening to *A Tale of Two Cities* that the worlds of London and Paris in his novel are very similar:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way--in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

There were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face, on the throne of England; there were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face, on the throne of France. In both countries it was clearer than crystal to the lords of the State preserves of loaves and fishes, that things in general were settled for ever.

It was the year of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five.

In this opening he both sets us back in time - a novel of 1859 set in 1775 - and brings us sharply back to the present day: it is 'so far like the present period'. We see from the very beginning that he is using an historical setting for a modern parallel.

A Tale of Two Cities was one of two historical novels Dickens wrote, the other one being *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), which dealt with the period of the Gordon Riots (1780) and consequently kept an entirely English focus. *A Tale of Two Cities* moves between England and France, during that turbulent period of French history, the years leading up to and immediately following, the French Revolution of July 1789.

The timeline of the novel takes readers from 1757 to 1793/4. It is useful to see how Dickens uses the historical facts of the period as background. The Victorians were haunted by the memory and example of the French Revolution of 1789, which had happened only seventy years before Dickens wrote *A Tale of Two Cities*, and only twenty-three years before he was born. Childhood years in Portsmouth and Chatham would have presented instances of naval activity, or the results of it, from the wars between England and Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. For all his radicalism and reforming zeal, Dickens was not a revolutionary. Like most Victorians, he had a horror of riot and mob rule, and both *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* present the horrors of outbreaks of revolutionary and mob violence very powerfully. There were real fears in 19th century Britain that there could be a revolution here, especially given the worsening poverty of those at the bottom of the social structure, and the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation. Dickens is very clear about the similarities between pre-revolutionary France, and contemporary Britain, in chapter 1 of *A Tale of Two Cities* as we have just seen. The novel is therefore a warning, and Dickens is doing something very brave in confronting one of the great Victorian fears, that of revolution, albeit dressing it up in period costume.

A Tale of Two Cities was published, as was the case with all of Dickens' novels, as a serial. It came out in weekly parts (one or two chapters a week) in Dickens's journal *All the Year Round*, between 30 April and 26 November 1859. Its appearance would, by today's expectations and standards, have been unprepossessing: simply pages of double columns of closely printed text without the relief of illustrations. *A Tale of Two Cities* was published in the USA almost contemporaneously (7 May to 3 December 1859, in *Harper's Weekly*). A monthly serial version came out in the UK between June and December 1859, and a one-volume edition in December of that year. Dickens was pleased with the way it was going .

To JOHN FORSTER, [11 MARCH 1859]

This is merely to certify that I have got exactly the name for the story that is wanted; exactly what will fit the opening to a T. A TALE OF TWO CITIES. Also, that I have struck out a rather original and bold idea. That is, at the end of each month to publish the monthly part in the green cover, with the two illustrations, at the old shilling. This will give *All the Year Round* always the interest and precedence of a fresh weekly portion during the month; and will give me my old standing with my old public, and the advantage (very necessary in this story) of having numbers of people who read it in no portions smaller than a monthly part.... My American ambassador pays a thousand pounds for the first year, for the privilege of republishing in America one day after we publish here. Not bad?

All the Year Round sold well: 120,000 copies of the opening number, settling down to 100,000 thereafter (with *A Tale of Two Cities* as lead serial on first page). Its predecessor, *Household Words*, at best had a circulation of 40,000.

Dickens was far more comfortable with monthly serial parts (Carlyle called these weekly episodes 'teaspoonfuls'), but the discipline of a weekly serial was good for him in making him compress his material much more, and restrict his focus.

It was in the monthly part issues that the illustrations appeared. The typical format of a Dickens monthly part was two or three

chapters of the novel, depending on length (more in *A Tale of Two Cities*), with two illustrations relevant to the story at that point, and a few pages of adverts. The pamphlet would be bound in green wrappers, with a decorative cover. The one-volume edition included all the illustrations and a title-Page and frontispiece.

Dickens's illustrator for *A Tale of Two Cities* was Hablôt Knight Browne (or Phiz). He had been Dickens's principal illustrator since *Pickwick Papers* in 1836, but his work for *A Tale of Two Cities* is generally regarded as below his usual standard. He seemed to find dealing with an historical subject rather a problem, and some of the pictures are hasty and rushed, though there are some good crowd scenes, and a couple of opportunities for pictures of horses, which Phiz particularly liked doing. He did not, however, illustrate Dickens after *A Tale of Two Cities*: taste was now moving towards a more realistic style of illustration, for which Phiz was unsuited.

It helps to appreciate the skill of Dickens's writing in *A Tale of Two Cities* if one becomes aware of the way he distributed his material for the demands of the weekly serial, and break the novel down into its serial issues. It is then possible to see how he handles the end of instalments, making use of cliff-hanger endings designed to guarantee the return of his audience the following week. Sometimes he works on contrasting episodes within an instalment. We should also remember that he did not create the whole novel and then chop it up into instalments: he wrote as he went along, so we can witness the creative flow at work.

He was pleased with the novel, as is clear from this letter to François Regnier on 15 October 1859, when the weekly part issues were about halfway into Book the Third where Darnay has just been arrested by the Revolutionary Police.

My Dear Regnier

You will receive by Railway parcel, the Proof-Sheets of a story of mine that has been for some time in progress in my weekly Journal, and that will be published in a complete Volume about the middle of November. Nobody but Forster has yet seen the latter portions of it, or will see them until they are published. I want you to read it for two reasons. Firstly: because I hope it is the best story I have written. Secondly, because it treats of a very memorable time in France; and I should very much like to know what you think of its being dramatized for a French Theatre. If you should think it likely to be done, I should be glad to take some steps towards having it well done. The Story is an extraordinary success here, and I think the end of it is certain to make a still greater sensation.

Don't trouble yourself to write to me, mon ami, until you shall have had time to read the Proofs. Remember, they are Proofs, and Private; the latter chapters will not be before the public for five or six weeks to come.

He describes it as 'the best *story* I have ever written', which identifies Dickens's awareness of the importance of the narrative, the historical process of events at work in the novel. The suggested French dramatisation seems not to have happened and though he worked on a possible public reading from *A Tale of Two Cities*, it was never performed. There were, though, other adaptations. The first stage version came in March 1860 at the Lyceum, adapted by Tom Taylor. It ran for 35 performances. Most famous adaptation was *The Only Way*, a dramatisation by two clergymen, Revs. Wills and Langbridge, from 1899, again for the Lyceum. It concentrated on the Carton thread of plot and Sir John Martin-Harvey played the role many times. It created the popular image of Carton and was very influential. There was a silent film version in 1908. and of *The Only Way* in 1925, with Martin-Harvey as Carton. The first sound film was in 1935, with Ronald Colman, and again in 1958 with Dirk Bogarde. *The Only Way* was on BBC TV in 1948 and there have been a number of more recent TV serialisations of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Pearl Adam in *The Dickensian* in 1927 described the sensation of 'shrinking from the pitiless tread of oncoming tragedy through the sunniest pages' of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Much of the powerful impact of the novel comes from its inevitability: we know the history, but Dickens succeeds in building up suspense and tension magnificently. We travel along roads, we hear footsteps, we watch walking shoes being made and go on jourmies where there are road-menders called Jacques. We hear echoes, watch the sea rising, we are drawn to the Loadstone Rock, as the past suddenly returns to haunt and to shock us.

The public issue, the *Ancien Regime* and its harshness, the events of the Revolution and its aftermath, constitute one layer of the novel and it is a layer which we need to consider in relation to Thomas Carlyle as well as Dickens.

It would be hard to over-estimate the importance of Thomas Carlyle to the 19th century: essayist, biographer, social thinker, historian and at times irritating conscience for the age, he exerted tremendous influence over his contemporaries. He and Dickens first met in 1840 and remained friends from that time. Dickens said that he 'would go at all times farther to see Carlyle than any man alive; Carlyle thought Dickens 'one of a thousand' and in 1870 after Dickens's death, wrote to the family of

Dickens's 'rare and great worth as a brother man; a most cordial, sincere, clear-sighted, quietly decisive, just and loving man.' Carlyle greatly enjoyed Dickens's Public readings, describing them as 'a whole tragic, comic, heroic *theatre* visible, performing under one *hat*! Dickens knew Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution* (1837) very well indeed and had read and re-read it, so it is not surprising that he turned to Carlyle for assistance whilst preparing for *A Tale of Two Cities* though he was somewhat dismayed to receive two cartloads of books. His admiration for Carlyle and his 'wonderful book' deepened and he was keen to let Carlyle see the work in progress as in this letter, dated Sunday Thirtieth October, 1859:

My Dear Carlyle.

Forster is here, and has given me your message concerning the Tale of Two Cities -- which has heartily delighted me. It will be published some three weeks hence in one dose, after having occasioned me the utmost misery by being presented in the "teaspoon-full" form. Nevertheless I should like you to read what remains of it, before the Many-Headed does, and I therefore take heart to overwhelm you with the enclosed proofs. They are not long, and don't need to be returned. They go on to the end from the current No. and they include the current No. in case you should not have seen it.

I have said in the Preface to the complete Tale (said Preface is not here, because I have no Proof of it), "that all the references to the condition of the French people, however slight, are from trustworthy authorities; and that it has been one of my hopes to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to the philosophy of Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book."

Carlyle's history is splendid and symbolic, full of flashing lights at night. In order to get a sense of Dickens's approach to these powerful events, I would like to read part of his description of the storming of the Bastille, from *A Tale of Two Cities* Book 2 chapter 21, 'Echoing Footsteps'. It demonstrates the way he can build up inevitability and momentum, as he does throughout the novel.

Headlong, mad, and dangerous footsteps to force their way into anybody's life, footsteps not easily made clean again if once stained red, the footsteps raging in Saint Antoine afar off, as the little circle sat in the dark London window.

Saint Antoine had been, that morning, a vast dusky mass of scarecrows heaving to and fro, with frequent gleams of light above the billowy heads, where steel blades and bayonets shone in the sun. A tremendous roar arose from the throat of Saint Antoine, and a forest of naked arms struggled in the air like shrivelled branches of trees in a winter wind: all the fingers convulsively clutching at every weapon or semblance of a weapon that was thrown up from the depths below, no matter how far off.

Who gave them out, whence they last came, where they began, through what agency they crookedly quivered and jerked, scores at a time, over the heads of the crowd, like a kind of lightning, no eye in the throng could have told; but, muskets were being distributed--so were cartridges, powder, and ball, bars of iron and wood, knives, axes, pikes, every weapon that distracted ingenuity could discover or devise. People who could lay hold of nothing else, set themselves with bleeding hands to force stones and bricks out of their places in walls. Every pulse and heart in Saint Antoine was on high-fever strain and at high-fever heat. Every living creature there held life as of no account, and was demented with a passionate readiness to sacrifice it.

As a whirlpool of boiling waters has a centre point, so, all this raging circled round Defarge's wine-shop, and every human drop in the caldron had a tendency to be sucked towards the vortex where Defarge himself, already begrimed with gunpowder and sweat, issued orders, issued arms, thrust this man back, dragged this man forward, disarmed one to arm another, laboured and strove in the thickest of the uproar.

With a roar that sounded as if all the breath in France had been shaped into the detested word, the living sea rose, wave on wave, depth on depth, and overflowed the city to that point. Alarm-bells ringing, drums beating, the sea raging and thundering on its new beach, the attack began.

Deep ditches, double drawbridge, massive stone walls, eight great towers, cannon, muskets, fire and smoke. Through the fire and through the smoke--in the fire and in the smoke, for the sea cast him up against a cannon, and on the instant he became a cannonier--Defarge of the wine-shop worked like a manful soldier, Two fierce hours. Deep ditch, single drawbridge, massive stone walls, eight great towers, cannon, muskets, fire and smoke. One drawbridge down! "Work, comrades all, work! Work, Jacques One, Jacques Two, Jacques One Thousand, Jacques Two Thousand, Jacques Five-and-Twenty Thousand; in the name of all the Angels or the Devils--which you prefer--work!" Thus Defarge of the wine-shop, still at his gun, which had long gown hot.

"To me, women!" cried madame his wife. "What! We can kill as well as the men when the place is taken!" And to her, with a shrill thirsty cry, trooping women variously armed, but all armed in hunger and revenge.

Cannon, muskets, fire and smoke; but, still the deep ditch, the single drawbridge, the massive stone walls, and the eight great towers. Slight displacements of the raging sea, made by the falling wounded. Flashing weapons, blazing torches, smoking wagonloads of wet straw, hard work at neighbouring barricades in all directions, shrieks, volleys, execrations, bravery without stint, boom smash and rattle, and the furious sounding of the living sea; but, still the deep ditch, and the single drawbridge, and the massive stone walls, and the eight great towers, and still Defarge of the wine-shop at his gun, grown doubly hot by the service of Four fierce hours.

A white flag from within the fortress, and a parley--this dimly perceptible through the raging storm, nothing audible in it-- suddenly the sea rose immeasurably wider and higher, and swept Defarge of the wine-shop over the lowered drawbridge, past the massive stone outer walls, in among the eight great towers surrendered!

So resistless was the force of the ocean bearing him on, that even to draw his breath or turn his head was as impracticable as if he had been struggling in the surf at the South Sea, until he was landed in the outer courtyard of the Bastille. There, against an angle of a wall, he made a struggle to look about him. Jacques Three was nearly at his side; Madame Defarge, still heading some of her women, was visible in the inner distance, and her knife was in her hand. Everywhere was tumult, exultation, deafening and maniacal bewilderment, astounding noise, yet furious dumb-show.

"The Prisoners!"

"The Records!"

"The secret cells!"

"The instruments of torture!"

"The Prisoners!"

Of all these cries, and ten thousand incoherences, "The Prisoners!" was the cry most taken up by the sea that rushed in, as if there were an eternity of people, as well as of time and space. When the foremost billows rolled past, bearing the prison officers with them, and threatening them all with instant death if any secret nook remained undisclosed, Defarge laid his strong hand on the breast of one of these men--a man with a grey head, who had a lighted torch in his hand-- separated him from the rest, and got him between himself and the wall.

"Show me the North Tower!" said Defarge. "Quick!"

Through gloomy vaults where the light of day had never shone, past hideous doors of dark dens and cages, down cavernous flights of steps, and again up steep rugged ascents of stone and brick, more like dry waterfalls than staircases, Defarge, the turnkey, and Jacques Three, linked hand and arm, went with all the speed they could make. Here and there, especially at first, the inundation started on them and swept by; but when they had done descending, and were winding and climbing up a tower, they were alone. Hemmed in here by the massive thickness of walls and arches, the storm within the fortress and without was only audible to them in a dull, subdued way, as if the noise out of which they had come had almost destroyed their sense of hearing.

... (They find 105 North Tower, the cell in which Manette had been imprisoned, and there discover his testament, telling the whole story of the Evremonde brothers and accusing all their descendants. This is the key to the development of the plot from this point forward)

The sea of black and threatening waters, and of destructive upheaving of wave against wave, whose depths were yet unfathomed and whose forces were yet unknown. The remorseless sea of turbulently swaying shapes, voices of vengeance, and faces hardened in the furnaces of suffering until the touch of pity could make no mark on them.

But, in the ocean of faces where every fierce and furious expression was in vivid life, there were two groups of faces--each seven in number--so fixedly contrasting with the rest, that never did sea roll which bore more memorable wrecks with it. Seven faces of prisoners, suddenly released by the storm that had burst their tomb, were carried high overhead: all scared, all lost, all wondering and amazed, as if the Last Day were come, and those who rejoiced around them were lost spirits. Other seven faces there were, carried higher, seven dead faces, whose drooping eyelids and half-seen eyes awaited the Last Day. Impassive faces, yet with a suspended--not an abolished--expression on them; faces, rather, in a fearful pause, as having yet to raise the dropped lids of the eyes, and bear witness with the bloodless lips, "THOU DIDST IT!"

Seven prisoners released, seven gory heads on pikes, the keys of the accursed fortress of the eight strong towers, some discovered letters and other memorials of prisoners of old time, long dead of broken hearts,--such, and such--like, the loudly echoing footsteps of Saint Antoine escort through the Paris streets in mid-July, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine.

Dickens supported the power in his own writing with very thorough research, as can be seen from this response to Bulwer-Lytton's praise and criticism of the novel:

Gad's Hill, Tuesday, June 5th, 1860.

My Dear Bulwer Lytton,

I am very much interested and gratified by your letter concerning "A Tale of Two Cities." I do not quite agree with you on two points, but that is no deduction from my pleasure.

In the first place, although the surrender of the feudal privileges (on a motion seconded by a nobleman of great rank) was the occasion of a sentimental scene, I see no reason to doubt, but on the contrary, many reasons to believe, that some of these privileges had been used to the frightful oppression of the peasant, quite as near to the time of the Revolution as the doctor's narrative, which, you will remember, dates long before the Terror. And surely when the new philosophy was the talk of the salons and the slang of the hour, it is not unreasonable or unallowable to suppose a nobleman wedded to the old cruel ideas, and representing the time going out, as his nephew represents the time coming in; as to the condition of the peasant in France generally at that day, I take it that if anything be certain on earth it is certain that it was intolerable. No *ex post facto* enquiries and provings by figures will hold water, surely, against the tremendous testimony of men living at the time.

There is a curious book printed at Amsterdam, written to make out no case whatever, and tiresome enough in its literal dictionary-like minuteness, scattered up and down the pages of which is full authority for my marquis. This is "Mercier's Tableau de Paris." Rousseau is the authority for the peasant's shutting up his house when he had a bit of meat. The tax-taker was the authority for the wretched creature's impoverishment.

I am not clear, and I never have been clear, respecting that canon of fiction which forbids the interposition of accident in such a case as Madame Defarge's death. Where the accident is inseparable from the passion and emotion of the character, where it is strictly consistent with the whole design, and arises out of some culminating proceeding on the part of the character which the whole story has led up to, it seems to me to become, as it were, an act of divine justice. And when I use Miss Pross (though this is quite another question) to bring about that catastrophe, I have the positive intention of making that half-comic intervention a part of the desperate woman's failure, and of opposing that mean death -- instead of a desperate one in the streets, which she wouldn't have minded -- to the dignity of Carton's wrong or right; this was the design, and seemed to be in the fitness of things.

Ever affectionately and faithfully

[CHARLES DICKENS]

Alongside the riveting public theme, the inevitability of history in *A Tale of Two Cities*, runs an equally powerful personal story, or rather, several personal stories.

We have already considered Dickens's words in his *Preface*, especially his words that he has verified 'what is done and suffered' in the novel. There is another fascinating extract given in the authorial voice rather than spoken through a character, at the start of chapter three.

'A Wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it! Something of the awfulness, even of Death itself, is referable to this. No more can I turn the leaves of this dear book that I loved, and vainly hope in time to read it all. No more can I look into the depths of this unfathomable water, wherein, as momentary lights glanced into it, I have had glimpses of buried treasure and other things submerged. It was appointed that the book should shut with a spring, for ever and for ever, when I had read but a page. It was appointed that the water should be locked in an eternal frost, when the light was playing on its surface, and I stood in ignorance on the shore. My friend is dead, my neighbour is dead, my love, the darling of my soul, is dead; it is the inexorable consolidation and perpetuation of the secret that was always in that individuality, and which I shall carry

in mine to my life's end. In any of the burial-places of this city through which I pass, is there a sleeper more inscrutable than its busy inhabitants are, in their innermost personality, to me, or than I am to them?'

The personal intensity there characterises the novel, and later in the same chapter, Jarvis Lorry, on board the Dover mail, is rocked to sleep by the movement of the coach and dreams of recent experiences, the 'recalling to life' of Dr Manette:

'But, though the bank was almost always with him, and though the coach (in a confused way, like the presence of pain under an opiate) was always with him, there was another current of impression that never ceased to run, all through the night. He was on his way to dig some one out of a grave.

Now, which of the multitude of faces that showed themselves before him was the true face of the buried person, the shadows of the night did not indicate; but they were all the faces of a man of five-and- forty by years, and they differed principally in the passions they expressed, and in the ghastliness of their worn and wasted state. Pride, contempt, defiance, stubbornness, submission, lamentation, succeeded one another; so did varieties of sunken cheek, cadaverous colour, emaciated hands and figures. But the face was in the main one face, and every head was prematurely white. A hundred times the dozing passenger inquired of this spectre:

"Buried how long?"

The answer was always the same: "Almost eighteen years."

"You had abandoned all hope of being dug out?"

"Long ago."

"You know that you are recalled to life?"

"They tell me so."

"I hope you care to live?"

"I can't say."

It is Manette's face he sees before him: a man of 45 years who had been imprisoned for almost 18 years and who is now to be 'recalled to life'.

Earlier, we considered some significant dates. Dickens met Ellen Ternan in 1857: he was aged 45, she was 18 and had been born in Rochester in 1839. Dickens changed the length of Manette's imprisonment to 'almost 18 years' from his original idea of 15 years. When we meet Lucie she is 'not more than seventeen'. Dickens's sister-in-law Mary Hogarth died aged seventeen on 7 May 1837 and this event affected him profoundly. There are, we are told, echoes of Ellen's appearance in the description of Lucie in chapter 4 (which appeared on 7 May 1859, the anniversary of Mary's death) and the description is powerfully visualised:

'...he saw standing to receive him by the table between them and the fire, a young lady of not more than seventeen, in a riding-cloak, and still holding her straw travelling-hat by its ribbon in her hand. As his eyes rested on a short, slight, pretty figure, a quantity of golden hair, a pair of blue eyes that met his own with an inquiring look, and a forehead with a singular capacity (remembering how young and smooth it was), of rifting and knitting itself into an expression that was not quite one of perplexity, or wonder, or alarm, or merely of a bright fixed attention, though it included all the four expressions-as his eyes rested on these things, a sudden vivid likeness passed before him, of a child whom he had held in his arms on the passage across that very Channel, one cold time, when the hail drifted heavily and the sea ran high.'

And finally there is Sidney Carton: 'I am a disappointed drudge, sir. I care for no man on earth, and no man on earth cares for me.'

It may, at first glance, seem paradoxical to include a character whose death is the culminating moment of the novel amongst those who are, in the words of the title of the first book of *A Tale of Two Cities*, 'Recalled to Life', yet this is exactly the case for Sydney Carton. His career through the novel engages him in a process of self-discovery which enables him to emerge from a dissolute life by taking a decision which provides his life with a purpose: its loss in the interests of other people as a consequence of love.

Carton's first appearance is for a narrative function. His physical similarity to Charles Darnay at the latter's trial at the Old Bailey permits Darnay's release, and draws Carton into the small circle of Darnay and the Manettes. It permits him meeting Lucie and finding himself attracted to her. The parallel thread in Carton's story involves his origins, his intelligence and ability, his lack of purpose, his employment as Stryver's 'jackal', preparing the material for the court cases which Stryver will win:

'...idlest and most unpromising of men, (he) was Stryver's great ally. What the two drank together, between Hilary term and Michaelmas, might have floated a king's ship... they went the same circuit, and even there they prolonged their usual orgies late into the night, and Carton was rumoured to be seen at broad day, going home stealthily and unsteadily to his lodgings, like a dissipated cat.'

Thus far, Carton's involvement in the novel is conventional: plot purpose, character contrast, and a potential development of the love interest in the emergence of the Lucie-Darnay-Carton triangle. He is, of course, an unconventional lover figure, sharply set against the more conventional Darnay.

As Carton becomes increasingly affected by his love for Lucie, his character starts to develop in ways which draw him out of a conventional alternative lover's role into that of a man who begins to reassess his whole existence. His love for Lucie does not blind him to its impossibility, given her devotion to Darnay and Carton's own acknowledged unlikelihood as her lover. This is the main interest in the character: his capacity for coming to judge and know himself, and his decision to give some purpose to his existence, once he has discovered something to which it is worth giving himself. Dickens describes the moment of realisation like this:

'Waste forces within him, and a desert all around, this man stood still on his way across a silent terrace, and saw for a moment, lying in the wilderness before him, a mirage of honourable ambition, self-denial and perseverance. In the fair city of this vision, there were airy galleries from which the loves and graces looked upon him, gardens in which the fruits of life hung ripening, waters of Hope that sparkled in his sight. A moment, and it was gone. Climbing to a high chamber in a well of houses, he threw himself down in his clothes on a neglected bed, and its pillow was wet with wasted tears.'

Darnay's arrest as an aristocrat in revolutionary France, Lucie's devoted pursuit of him, placing herself and her father at risk, all encourage Carton into action. He once again exploits the physical similarity between himself and Darnay, visits him in prison, drugs him in order to facilitate his escape, and takes his place on the scaffold. To him is given the moving final speech of the novel, with its climax in words which have become part of everyone's cultural inheritance. As he thinks into the future, he sees the people for whom he has such powerful compassion living on in happiness and maintaining 'a sanctuary in their hearts' for him.

Dickens's depiction of Carton pursues a fascination he has been developing with the dissolute figure who wastes his better talents. He has investigated this in Steerforth in *David Copperfield*, Harthouse in *Hard Times*, and will yet do so in Eugene Wrayburn in *Our Mutual Friend*. Carton also fits into the fascination Dickens has with doubleness in characterisation: Darnay and he are two sides of a character which Dickens emphasises by giving them a physical likeness. In exploring the potential in a nature which is intelligent, talented, capable of hard work and great loyalty, yet feels that life is pointless until he starts to find himself in love, Dickens is touching some of the deepest springs of human personality and action. Carton is prevented from becoming a sentimental figure by his innate strength, tragically discovered when the only means of saving what is important in his life is to lose it in the interest of others.

'There is nothing more to do,' said he, glancing upward at the moon, 'until tomorrow. I can't sleep.'

It was not a reckless manner, the manner in which he said these words aloud under the fast-sailing clouds, nor was it more expressive of negligence than defiance. It was the settled manner of a tired man, who had wandered and struggled and got lost, but who at length struck into his road and saw its end.'

Any discussion of this novel is almost inevitably bound to end with its famous concluding words, Carton at the foot of the guillotine:

They said of him, about the city that night, that it was the peacefullest man's face ever beheld there. Many added that he looked sublime and prophetic.

One of the most remarkable sufferers by the same axe--a woman--had asked at the foot of the same scaffold, not long before, to be allowed to write down the thoughts that were inspiring her. If he had given any utterance to his, and they were prophetic, they would have been these:

"I see Barsad, and Cly, Defarge, The Vengeance, the Juryman, the Judge, long ranks of the new oppressors who have risen on the destruction of the old, perishing by this retributive instrument, before it shall cease out of its present use. I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through

long years to come, I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out.

"I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy, in that England which I shall see no more. I see Her with a child upon her bosom, who bears my name. I see her father, aged and bent, but otherwise restored, and faithful to all men in his healing office, and at peace. I see the good old man, so long their friend, in ten years' time enriching them with all he has, and passing tranquilly to his reward.

"I see that I hold a sanctuary in their hearts, and in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence. I see her, an old woman, weeping for me on the anniversary of this day. I see her and her husband, their course done, lying side by side in their last earthly bed, and I know that each was not more honoured and held sacred in the other's soul, than I was in the souls of both.

"I see that child who lay upon her bosom and who bore my name, a man winning his way up in that path of life which once was mine. I see him winning it so well, that my name is made illustrious there by the light of his. I see the blots I threw upon it, faded away. I see him, fore-most of just judges and honoured men, bringing a boy of my name, with a forehead that I know and golden hair, to this place-- then fair to look upon, with not a trace of this day's disfigurement --and I hear him tell the child my story, with a tender and a faltering voice.

"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known."